

Wanderers all set for the match of the decade

WYCOMBE Wanderers, a club with a proud history spanning some 90 years, will be breaking new ground when they walk out in front of 12,000 excited spectators for tomorrow's (Saturday) F.A. Cup tie against Middlesbrough.

This match, which has kindled more interest than any other game since the 1957 Amateur Cup final, is the first time the club have ever reached the third round of the competition. To do it, they have had to beat Bournemouth, a Third Division side, away from home and before that five other amateur clubs.

Their prize for that achievement is the visit of one of the finest sides in the whole of Great Britain — Middlesbrough. The 'Boro' deserve that title for the way they have performed in the First Division this season.

Many felt Boro' wouldn't cope with the additional pressures of the First Division. Charlton has proved them wrong. With the players available, he had blended them into a hard, talented and thoroughly workmanlike team that has shocked the footballing world this term. His record must be unique.

So just what chance have an amateur team got against one of the finest clubs in the country? Will it be a five or six goal lesson for Wycombe or can they hold their own in such distinguished company?

Wanderers have several things going for them. Firstly, there's the partisan crowd to urge them on, there's Loakes Park itself which will surprise the Middlesbrough players, and there is a belief in the home team that they can do well. Against them, there are 12 highly trained professional footballers currently on the crest of a wave, who have been defeated only a handful of times this season and who cannot afford to lose this match at any cost.

The cards look heavily stacked against the Blues. On paper, they appear to have not even the

remotest chance of pulling off victory, perhaps not even a draw. The key to the whole question of tomorrow's game is in the difference between the amateur and professional world.

Wycombe manager Brian Lee has a glowing respect for that difference. He has stated on both television and radio: "We have no chance."

He watched Middlesbrough in action last week at Goodison

light plaster at present. Dave has been troubled by the ankle all season and chipped a bone in Saturday's game against Sutton.

Mick Holifield, who broke his wrist in the Bournemouth replay, could well be in line for a return to the side after missing the last two weeks. He trained on Sunday and had an X-ray yesterday (Thursday).

The Wycombe players hold some hope of a good result. Two

So, while the Wycombe players are confident of a good showing, Middlesbrough will not be making the mistake of over-confidence. They have had Wanderers watched a couple of times, including the replay against Bournemouth, and realise the task in front of them.

They will have had a good look at the Loakes Park pitch, which the National Press have described as their possible graveyard.

The attitude of Harold Shepherdson, Middlesbrough's assistant manager, emphasises how seriously this match is being taken.

"Wycombe are one of the best non-league teams I have seen," he told manager Jack Charlton. "I was tremendously impressed by their spirit, courage and ability. They never stopped running."

And there is no danger of Middlesbrough underestimating Wycombe Wanderers. The First Division side have already been warned: "Treat Wycombe with every respect." Harold Shepherdson is the Boro's assistant manager and chief "spy." He has a world-travelled international career behind him, too.

Apart from being associated with four World Cups, "Shep" had well over 150 international appearances. An expert at weighing up opposition, Shepherdson saw Wycombe beat Bournemouth. He returned home with a favourable impression.

Strange, though it may seem, tomorrow's result is almost immaterial to Wycombe Wanderers. The pleasure they have given to thousands this term — as they have in the last five seasons — has been immeasurable. Their financial return will also be considerable.

The two matches against Bournemouth, especially the replay, will long be remembered by those who travelled down to Dean Court. The superb entertainment and standard of soccer in the first round against Cheltenham at Loakes Park, the excitement of the Margate game in the fourth qualifying round — this is the real reward.

F.A. Cup Third Round preview by STUART EARP

Park where they drew 1-1 with Everton. He feels their main strength is in their work rate and organisation. "Their success has stemmed from team work. No one individual impressed me. They have no prima donnas in their team, hard work is their key. I fancy them to reach Wembley and take the cup this year."

As for any weaknesses in the side, Brian replied, "I would not be so arrogant to suggest any weakness at all."

"I've got too much respect for Middlesbrough and professional football to fantasise about a Wycombe victory. Our great moment is that we're in the third round. I hope the town enjoy it. We'll probably get slaughtered and if we play at our best I expect to lose by three or four goals."

Latest team news from Middlesbrough is that their veteran midfield general Bobby Murdoch will definitely not play. The ex-Celtic star began a two week suspension on Wednesday after going over the 12 point limit. His place will probably go to Peter Brine, who was originally the substitute. Otherwise Boro' field their full strength side.

Wanderers will not select their team until shortly before the kick-off. One man unlikely to play, though, is Dave Bullock, who has his ankle in a

of them — skipper Alan Phillips and full back Gary Hand — were in the Hendon team that were written off when they travelled up to play Newcastle in the third round last year. No-one gave them an earthly, least of all Newcastle who paid the price for their over-confidence by being held to a 1-1 draw on their own St. James' Park ground. Newcastle won the replay at Watford comfortably but Phillips and Hand both learned from their experiences.

I asked Alan about Wycombe's chances tomorrow. "Full, total concentration will be needed against a team like Middlesbrough," he said. "I feel we could be in with a chance of stopping them from scoring and the first 20 minutes or so so will be vital. In the first quarter at Newcastle they slaughtered us but once we had held out, we began to believe in ourselves. There's no doubt Middlesbrough are a very fine side . . . but there's always a chance."

Gary Hand expects Middlesbrough to be a different kettle of fish to Newcastle. "They're more workmanlike. They had the stars at Newcastle and they thought they would outplay us completely."

"Hendon's result at Newcastle was no fluke and if we can nick one against Middlesbrough we could be in with a chance. An early goal would be crucial."